DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 804 HE 030 573

AUTHOR	Fretwell, E. K., Jr.
TITLE	The Interim Presidency: Guidelines for University and College Governing Boards. AGB Special Report.
INSTITUTION	Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association, New York, NY. College Retirement Equities Fund.
PUB DATE	1995-00-00
NOTE	54p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, One Dupont Circle, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036; phone: 202-296-8400; fax: 202-223-7053 ($9.95 members, 10 or more, $6.95 each; $13.95 nonmembers, 10 or more, $10.95 each).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Policy; Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Administrator Selection; Agency Role; *Board Administrator Relationship; College Administration; *College Presidents; Employment Practices; *Governance; Governing Boards; Higher Education; Interviews; Personnel Policy; Power Structure; Search Committees (Personnel); Surveys

ABSTRACT

These guidelines for college and university governing boards concern the selection of and relations with interim college presidents, and are based on interviews with 52 interim presidents, including some who have served in that position more than once, and 20 other college and university personnel in 20 states. An introductory section outlines eight specific suggestions based on salient findings of the study: a clear and timely selection process; early decisions concerning expectations about the interim president's role; appointing a person who would not likely be a candidate for permanent president; exploring a variety of sources for candidates; limiting major objectives for this position; delegating real responsibility; examining the successful elements of previous search procedures; and ensuring that the interim president is firmly in control before starting the search for a permanent president. These recommendations are explored further in subsequent sections, which offer specific procedural suggestions for the search process, advice for interim presidents from those who have occupied the position, and a discussion of the advantages and opportunities that interim presidencies afford to higher education systems. Appended materials include information about the interviewees and a list of tips from previous interim presidents. (Contains 18 references.) (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 412 804

SPECIAL REPORT

AGB

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

AGB

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Interim Presidency:

Guidelines for University and College Governing Boards

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

E. K. FRETWELL JR.

HE030573

The Interim Presidency:

Guidelines for University and College Governing Boards

E.K. Fretwell Jr.
Chancellor Emeritus
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Association of Governing Boards
of Universities and Colleges
Washington, D.C.
1995

ABOUT AGB

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) advances the practice of voluntary trusteeship, a distinguishing characteristic of American higher education for more than 350 years. AGB's membership comprises 1,100 boards that oversee 1,700 campuses in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Europe, and Pacific Trust Territories. It includes every type of higher education institution in the public and private sectors, state coordinating boards, specialized schools, boards of college and university foundations, and independent K-12 schools. More than 30,000 individuals are members of these boards and members of AGB.

This publication is intended to inform debate and discussion, not to represent or imply endorsement by the association or its members.

© 1995 Association of Governing Boards
of Universities and Colleges
One Dupont Circle, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036

All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

This special report is published in part by a generous grant from Teachers Insurance Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund.

CONTENTS

Foreword iv
About the Author v
Acknowledgements vi
Dedication vii
Introduction viii
Eight Up Front Findings xi
Part I: Ten Suggestions for Trustees 1
Part II: Advice to Interim Presidents from
Those Who Have Been There 11
Part III: Higher Education Systems: Advantages and Opportunities 25
A Final Word 30
Appendices
A: About the Interviewees 31
B: Where They Went Wrong: Problems
of Previous Presidents 33
C: Tips From Some Veterans 37
Bibliography 39

FOREWORD

E.K. Fretwell's research of the interim presidency addresses a widely practiced but underexamined type of higher education leadership. We are pleased to publish his important work in this AGB Special Report.

Interim chief executives are among the unsung heroes of higher education. Many pick up the reins of leadership under the most difficult circumstances: Their term of office is limited, their challenges are great, and their performance and demeanor are under the scrutiny of many watchful eyes. Some find themselves without the professional support of a familiar team of colleagues and the personal support of nearby family and friends. Clearly, these individuals are committed caretakers who place the institution's interests ahead of their own.

Fretwell's research is a long-overdue recognition of the special contributions made by interim presidents. This report presents pragmatic advice and guidance for boards who seek and support an interim president—a difficult task made more complicated because it usually occurs with little or no warning and typically is sandwiched between two other daunting events: a presidential resignation and a presidential search.

What's more, an increasing number of governing boards that oversee stable, well-run institutions should consider interim presidencies more often than they do. Many situations often make sense for such decisions, including the need for extended sabbaticals and other leaves of absence for incumbent chief executives who served with distinction for externded periods and need real time to recharge their batteries. Given the enormous pressures on the men and women who lead academic institutions, along with what may be a decline in their average terms in the future, the interim presidency may prove to be an increasingly valuable practice.

In these pages, trustees, incumbent presidents and chancellors, and other senior-level executives are offered a blueprint for ensuring that an interim presidency is successful—whether such a person is promoted from inside or recruited from outside the institution. All will find this concise, informative work insightful, practical, and reassuring.

AGB is indebted to TIAA-CREF for making E.K. Fretwell's research and its publication possible.

Richard T. Ingram
President
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Washington, D.C.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E.K. Fretwell Jr., chancellor emeritus of the University of North Carolina, has more than 23 years experience as a chief executive in higher education, including an interim presidency of the University of Massachusetts system, chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and president of the State University of New York College at Buffalo. He is a past chair of AGB's Council of Presidents and a former trustee of Wesleyan University and Canisius College.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is based on interviews with 52 interim presidents and 20 other college and university personnel in 20 states, made possible by a grant covering travel and related costs from TIAA-CREF, arranged by Peggy Heim.

The cooperation of these 72 people was exceptional. Busy as these men and women were, none refused to be interviewed, and each shared ideas and perspectives freely and helpfully. In general, all the interim presidents indicated that they enjoyed their work—at least most of the time—and were more than willing to share their experiences in the hope that others might benefit. I thank them all and wish them good luck in their future endeavors. The heads of systems and statewide governing board members, although not great in number in this study, also provided useful perspective.

Among the interim presidents I interviewed, those who have served more than one interim assignment deserve special commendation. They include Norman Auburn, Bob Barringer, Donna Benson, Murray Block, Randolph Bromery, Leo Corbie, John Bradford Davis, Nell Eurich, Virginia Lester, Father James Loughran, S.J., Sister Colette Mahoney, Robert MacVittie, James A. (Dolph) Norton, Sidney Rand, John Ryan, and Marvin Wachman.

In addition, I thank helpful friends and colleagues with whom I discussed issues involving the interim president role. Many of them suggested likely institutions and interim presidents to include. My only regret is that time and travel limitations precluded me from doing more interviews.

I also thank the 26 readers who reviewed portions of the draft manuscript. Seventeen of these people were interviewees. The nine others were also experienced leaders in higher education. Their comments were of great value in preparing the second draft.

Tom Ingram, Rick Legon, Dan Levin, and Deborah Bongiorno at AGB provided helpful advice and useful suggestions. Elaine Deese, administrative assistant in the Office of the Chancellors Emeriti at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has been especially helpful in scheduling interviews and travel, as well as handling the major job of copying and recopying the manuscript itself.

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the memories of two outstanding interim presidents: Harold Delaney and Alfred Canon.

Harold possessed a clear perspective and deep understanding of people and higher education institutions. He capped a distinguished career as a system official in three states and as executive vice president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities by serving as interim president of Chicago State University and of Maryland's Frostburg State University and Bowie State University. A good friend and colleague of some 25 years, he shared his valuable wisdom with me shortly before his untimely death.

Alf moved from a vice chancellorship at the University of North Carolina at Asheville to the demanding role of interim president at nearby Warren Wilson College at a time when he was really needed. During his relatively long and constantly challenging interim presidency, he helped a caring and tightly linked campus community come to understand itself better. He strengthened significantly its nationally unique role as an institution focused on liberal learning, work, and service.

Leaders such as Harold and Alf are sorely missed. Their good works live on.

E. K. Fretwell Jr.

INTRODUCTION

You are a member of the governing board of a college or university about which you care a great deal. You have devoted countless hours of your valuable time without pay because you believe in the importance of your institution and in the role of higher education in our society. While power and responsibilities increasingly are shared on today's campuses, you know from your own real-world experience that effective leadership at the top continues to be absolutely vital.

Naturally, you are deeply concerned when you learn that your president will no longer be serving you. Perhaps that individual is moving to a more attractive assignment elsewhere. Or, in less fortunate circumstances, the reason may be failing health, or even death. And there also are situations in which "things just weren't working out," and under one guise or another a resignation is announced.

What to do next?

If the departure is a number of months away, you may have time to conduct a thorough nationwide presidential search with extensive stakeholder participation. But it doesn't always turn out that way—and a good search must not be rushed. This report describes some of the decisions you will face in such a case and help you identify the steps you need to take.

The interim stage at your college or university—between now and the time a carefully selected permanent president takes up the reins—is a crucial time. Much can go wrong. But given the right procedures and a little luck, your institution can emerge stronger and your board wiser and more effective. Institutional stocktaking can be vital! Roger R. Blunt, chair of AGB (1994-96) and vice chair of the University of Maryland System Board of Regents, points out that an interim period can be a good time to reassess and evaluate the progress of the institution (or system), even if it isn't in trouble at the moment.

An *interim president* is defined here as the chief executive in charge when there is no "regular" president. This report also refers to the position of "permanent" president, in contrast to the shorter term interim president. Of course, no president is literally permanent, but this term is self-explanatory.

Observations reported in this study are based on confidential one-on-one interviews with 52 interim presidents and 20 other people knowledgeable about higher education executive leadership (such as trustees, search consultants, and system heads). Some of the 52 interim presidents have held several such positions in sequence, in one case as many as nine. While these 52 are not necessarily statistically representative of the hundreds of

individuals who have served as interim presidents in recent years, their situations represent a broad range of geographic locations and institutional types. Both public and independent institutions are represented, as are major research and comprehensive universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges. Some are free-standing institutions; others are campuses in large systems. Fifteen of the 52 interim presidents were women; ten were racial minorities. Further details appear in Appendix A.

The respondents were eager to share the high points of their experience with trustees, possible future interim presidents, and system leaders. I have selected those examples and observations from the 72 interviews that I believe to be most useful, based on my own experience as a board member at an institution facing a sudden presidential departure, twice as a permanent president, and as the interim head of a system (which, incidentally, had to identify a campus interim president on very short notice). However, I claim no omniscience.

It is easy to describe situations in which everything went well. But even more can be learned from observing how difficult situations were handled. More than half the interim presidents (31 of 52) were called in to fill a vacancy where a departing president left a troubled setting. Selection of these cases for discussion does not necessarily suggest that most campuses with presidential changes are in trouble. But many are. It may be that troubled campuses are more likely to find themselves needing an interim president as a consequence of serious internal problems that prevent the establishment of a clear order of succession before a president leaves.

We can learn from campuses where the incoming interim president found many demanding tasks to perform on short notice: goals to clarify, finances to restructure, hot heads to cool, healing to perform, and loose ends to tie up. The aim in all cases was to improve the situation so the subsequent permanent president could move forward on a firm footing with some, if not all, of the "remedial work" done. One permanent president I interviewed expressed deep thanks to his interim predecessor, who had cleared up some troublesome personnel problems. That interim president's good work enabled the new leader to move successfully ahead to raise enrollment, enhance campus spirit, and build a solid springboard for a successful fund campaign.

To help the busy reader, this report gives you useful information in one sitting. Begin with the eight "Up Front Findings" that follow. Then move to Part I, which provides specific advice for boards.

Part II presents the interim president experience to a person who is considering taking such a position. Trustees also may benefit from seeing

such an assignment from the point of view of the individual involved.

Finally, since statewide or other types of systems account for much of today's higher education enrollment, Part III is aimed at system board members and chief executives, usually referred to here as "chancellors." This report uses the term "president" to refer to *campus* chief executives, as in such large systems as the State University of New York (SUNY), the City University of New York (CUNY), and the California State University (CSU) system.

EIGHT "UP FRONT" FINDINGS

Each of these brief suggestions to governing boards will receive more attention in Parts I, II, and III.

1. Proceed. The process of selecting and installing an interim president should be carried out in a clear and timely manner. It should be neither perfunctory nor too drawn out. It should demonstrate the enlightened responsibility of the governing board to be businesslike and to care about stakeholder interests. It should exemplify good stewardship.

2. Decide. Determine early on whether you want your interim president to (a) carry on with "business as usual," which might in some circumstances be the right approach, or (b) take advantage of the interim period to make needed changes. Improving problem areas could help make the institution more effective and more attractive to candidates for the permanent presidency.

3. Agree. Do not anticipate making the interim president the permanent president. If you want change during the interim period, it is likely that some good candidates for the permanent job will be unwilling to take the associated risks of alienating some individuals. If there are good inside prospects for the permanent position, let them stand aside now to be possible candidates in the later search. Appoint a qualified person from either inside or outside who would *not* be a candidate.

4. Explore. Identify a variety of sources of potential interim presidents. Consider using a consultant or an executive search firm. Know what characteristics—including experience—you want in an interim president. Consult with faculty leadership to find out what they believe the institution needs. *Carefully check the track record of each serious potential appointee.*

5. Define. Determine a limited number of major objectives for this interim president to address. Discuss these with the interim president, and reach tentative agreement on them at the time of hiring, subject to possible later modification.

6. Delegate. Treat your interim president as a chief executive. This is absolutely vital, especially if you chose 2(b) above. Define *selected* goals and then delegate responsibility for them. Back the interim president in making needed changes, but don't dabble in internal administration. Stay in touch, but refrain from looking over the interim president's shoulder. At every turn, avoid the term "acting president."

7. Look back. Take a candid look at the most recent *previous* search procedure and how it turned out. Was that search a good one? What can you learn from it? Talk with key members of *that* search process if they are available. Also examine recent successful search procedures elsewhere, if possible.

8. Look ahead. Be sure the interim president is firmly in control before you start the search for the permanent president. Remember to search first for the future of the institution. Where do you want your new permanent leader to take the institution? Sometimes an especially perceptive interim president can help with this.

PART I

Ten Suggestions for Trustees

SPECIAL REPORT

As you begin the process of choosing an interim president, you face many questions. For example: Is the right person to be the interim president already on your campus? Should you look outside? And in any case, how can the interim president help you achieve what the institution needs?

Situations vary, of course, from one institution to another. What worked elsewhere or in the past on your campus might work again—or it might not. To find the answers to these questions, you and your board colleagues might consider the following ten suggestions for action.

1. Determine what the institution needs most at this point. For the ship with no clearly planned course, no wind is a good wind. Governing board members must know the needs of the campus and the priorities among those needs.

First, as one board chair put it, "We must know where the university is and where it needs to go right now." This person added that stating short-term objectives should be done in the context of establishing long-term goals: "The long-term needs must be clearly settled before the search for the permanent president is started."

If the future course is known and the vessel is sailing in good shape with favorable winds, the institution and its governing board are lucky.

But even if the future is not clear, the institution cannot delay in designating someone to be clearly in charge. Using an interim president can buy the time needed to work out the longer term future. That important work can then move ahead at least modestly during the interim period.

2. Identify characteristics of good interim president candidates. A list of ideal characteristics inevitably includes, among other attributes, the ability to walk on water. Since such an individual typically is not available to be an interim president, what should trustees realistically look for?

One observer opines that an effective interim president must have all the qualities of a good permanent president and be available to start work now. True! But more specifically, the interviews revealed five special areas of strength common among successful interim presidents.

- *Experience.* The interim president has to get up to speed immediately; there seldom is a honeymoon or time for leisurely contemplation. For that reason, this role is not one for a novice, no matter how well-meaning. Candidates must have campus chief executive experience. Logically, the experience should be in college or university leadership, but *occasional* exceptions have been made based on management skills *and* the ability to understand that making an academic institution function is not the same as running a bank, a commercial enterprise, or a government agency. Demonstrated ability to handle financial difficulties is invaluable. Experience in getting faculty to work together in harmony is another prime consideration.
- *Ability to learn fast.* Even an experienced university or college head needs to learn quickly and accurately on the new job. Respondents indicated repeatedly that each institution is unique and often in a state of change that may be viewed as either positive or negative. The candidate must be able to live creatively with ambiguity. (Part II of this paper provides some examples of what an interim president must do to start right.)
- *People skills.* It is a cliche to say that a successful leader must be able to motivate colleagues to work together to achieve the organization's goals. All too often, the departing president lacked the "people skills" necessary for leadership and lost the confidence of campus constituents as well as trustees. (For examples, many of them sad as well as revealing, see Appendix B.)

Charismatic leaders are in short supply and might not often choose to be interim presidents. Nevertheless, a successful interim president needs to evoke loyalty or at least acceptance on the part of the people already on campus, most of whom will remain after the interim president leaves. The interim president will need to develop effective relationships with faculty, staff, and students, as well as such off-campus groups as government officials, alumni, and community members. Exemplary relations with the governing board are paramount.

Terms such as "good listener," "motivator," and "people person" kept coming up in the interviews. The message is clear.

• *Integrity.* Without this, the other qualities are not enough. An interim president who is viewed solely as "belonging to the board" or "a company person" may not be ridden out of town on a rail, but the faculty will often view such a person as less effective. The interim president needs to be straight in the traditional sense of the word: You can trust this person. What he or she says is what you get.

Such people honor commitments unless there is an excellent reason for doing otherwise, and in that case, they make it clear *why* they did so. The interim president must be reasonably sensitive to the concerns of the campus but should not raise unrealistic expectations. Some interim presidents, in attempting to calm a complainant's ruffled feathers, may seem to convey agreement when actually they're just listening carefully. The ability to disagree but still retain respect is a needed quality.

In this area in particular, it is essential to learn about the candidate's record and reputation in earlier jobs.

• *Other personal qualities.* A good interim president needs to have an ego strong enough to motivate successful action but not so strong that it gets in the way. Disciplined personal ambition is important: The person must want to work hard at doing a good job while realizing the term is short and many positive achievements never may be recognized. The interim president must have the temperament, stamina, and rigor for the job. Even when the board and the interim president have agreed upon a limited number of *major* goals, the interim president may feel engaged in a daily juggling act of patching up existing problems while charting the course for the immediate future. Effective time management is vital.

Good judgment is essential, as is the ability to predict what will work and what will not. Since not all problems can be resolved simultaneously, the interim president must be able to identify which ones are most important and how and when they may be addressed. One hard-pressed but surviving interim president talks of being both cool and courageous.

3. Establish a committee to search and recommend. The procedure here is similar to what is typically recommended in a search for a permanent president, but with two major exceptions.

• *Time is of the essence.* The interim president needs to start work as soon as possible.

• The size of the search committee and the degree of campus consultation should be limited. While recognizing the importance of institutional participation, study participants agreed that substantial and wide-

spread stakeholder input should be saved for the search for the permanent president, when there is time to do an exhaustive job. Faculty participation can play a limited role in an interim president search, as long as the faculty representatives understand in advance that time demands preclude extensive consultation with the entire faculty senate or similar body.

Of course, these considerations put a heavy burden on the board's search committee to do a superb job in a very short time. The committee should be small, and its members should be committed to hard work and regular attendance at frequent meetings over a short span of time. The governing board's chair probably should not be chair of the search committee but should be in constant touch, possibly as a committee member. When the search committee is ready with one or more recommendations, the board chair should be ready to call a special meeting of the board on short notice to receive them.

Some boards have opted to use external consultants to advise on the process as well as to identify and screen candidates. Board leaders are encouraged to consult AGB about likely consultants and sources of consultants.

In any event, trustees should move quickly. As one former interim president urged, "Avoid too much wandering and wondering!"

4. Learn likely sources of interim president candidates and start screening. An overwhelming majority of the people interviewed for this study emphasized that the interim president should *not* be a candidate for the permanent position. As a system head explained, a person who really is trying out for the permanent job may sidestep important issues and avoid hard decisions in the quest to be popular. Similarly, one interim president noted that independent decision making can be done "only by somebody who doesn't want the permanent presidency." It is worth noting here, however, that a very small number of respondents felt strongly otherwise. Said one, "I would *never* rule out the possibility of succession." Others added that doing an effective job as an interim president demonstrates clearly how good the individual would be on a permanent basis.

While this restriction may rule out some otherwise qualified candidates, the temporary nature of the job opens up additional possibilities—particularly among retired presidents who do not want to enter a long-term commitment or persons wanting a challenging but brief break from their current position.

In general, here are some people to consider as candidates:

- Individuals within the institution (but do not limit yourself to this option).
- Recently retired presidents of other institutions, especially institutions similar to your own.

• Current vice presidents of other institutions.

• People with appropriate presidential experience now serving in other employment (such as higher education associations).

Of all of these possibilities, recently retired *successful* presidents typically are the best bet.

There also are several sources you can turn to for help in identifying candidates:

• Officers of higher education associations, including AGB, ACCT, ACE, AASCU, NASULGC, and other national organizations in Washington, D.C., whether or not they are in the chief executive search business.

• Officials of the religious organization with which your campus may have current or traditional ties.

• Civic and corporate leaders in your region. Some may be trustees of *other* institutions—and some may have been through recent searches themselves.

• Faculty members with experience at multiple institutions.

• Consultants who specialize in helping committees in your situation. Some maintain a roster of selected candidates, a number of whom have useful experience and a track record that can be checked. AGB can provide names of likely consultants.

• Registries of experienced campus chief executives who are available for interim presidential assignments. For example, the Registry of Interim College and University Presidents (in Lady Lake, Fla. and Westerville, Ohio), founded by former presidents Allen E. Koenig and Thomas H. Langevin, has placed a number of interim presidents.

The process of screening is very much like that described in other publications, such as AGB's *Presidential Search*, by Charles B. Neff and Barbara Leondar, and thus is not fully covered here. Still, five admonitions are in order as you identify and check finalists:

• Develop a focused list of questions for candidates to answer.

• Identify willingness and ability of candidates to start work soon and to depart gracefully once a permanent president comes aboard.

• Check with great care the current and previous job record, as well as personal qualities. Telephone conversations typically yield more candor than written references. If you are using consultants, do not rely solely on their recommendations.

• Take the search business very seriously. The job may be temporary, but you cannot afford to make a mistake.

• Don't hire cheap. It is poor economy.

5. Decide on objectives to be achieved during the interim period, and agree on the nature of the interim president's autonomy. Take a

good look at what you defined as the major current needs of the institution (under Step 1). Presumably the individual you're hiring is a good match for these.

Now is a good time to identify and prioritize the tasks to be carried out. Many interim presidents, well into the job or after their departure, indicated with sadness and frustration that they did *not* have the advantage of clear understanding on these matters at the time of hiring and starting the job.

At the same time, remember that the unexpected often occurs, and the person you hire is likely to have good ideas of his or her own. Encourage the interim president to discuss with the board any necessary revision of priorities based on his or her observation of the scene. After a month or two on the job, your new leader may provide a fresh "snapshot" of the college or university. (See Step 10 for more detail.)

To get the institution's job done, the new interim president needs both authority and autonomy within canons of good practice. If the new leader is to be a true chief executive, he or she can and must be fully in charge. Of course, the interim president will share progress as well as problems formally with the board—and sometimes quite informally along the way with board leadership. The interim president should have easy access to the chair and the executive committee. (See Step 9.)

Campus people as well as the external community must know that the interim president is truly in charge. If the individual is perceived as a figurehead or minimal caretaker, little will be accomplished. Faculty and staff may attempt "end runs" around the interim president to board members or others who are perceived as having the real power.

6. Develop a time frame for the interim period. Abraham Lincoln reportedly said a man's legs should be long enough to reach the ground. The interim presidential period should be long enough to get the job done—and no longer.

As a rule of thumb, trustees should begin by considering a span of six to 12 months. However, opinions on this matter range widely. A fast-moving, well-organized East Coast system head believes the whole thing should be over in six months. An equally savvy chancellor on the West Coast opts occasionally for two-year to three-year terms in special cases where a campus needs a lot of calming and soothing following deep controversy. (This approach also can be useful after a failed search for a permanent president.) Another respondent suggested it is much better for an interim president to serve for a year rather than three months: "In a year, some good remedial things can be done."

Alternatively, a flexible, open-ended interim period makes it possible

for the board to woo an attractive permanent president from another campus, because the permanent president's start date is not fixed. The board then can say, "We want you so much we'll wait for you!"

However long the term, it should begin by allowing time for both the interim president and the trustees to settle in and for any signs of tension to abate. For the first few months, the campus spotlight should be on the new yet short-term leader. Work should get under way toward resolving any immediate problems; as noted earlier, this will make the presidency more attractive to permanent candidates.

When the time is right—often about three months after the interim president starts—the board then may announce search procedures for the permanent president. In the meantime, board leaders should not be idle: They can use that period to select a more fully representative search committee and decide about the use of consultants. This also is the time to look seriously at the long-term future of the institution and develop findings to frame the search.

Another view, however, suggests trustees should name the search committee for the permanent president at the same time they name the interim president. In the words of an experienced president who also was an interim president: "This will show that they mean business—that the interim president really *is* interim." If there are any doubts about the board's plans, this may be good advice. In any case, making perfectly clear from the beginning that the interim president will not be a candidate for the permanent presidency (when such is the case) can help prevent the conflict and confusion that some interviewees described.

7. Describe terms of employment. Arrangements should be written and clear, and everyone should agree to them before the interim president's appointment is announced. The board and the interim president *must* have a common understanding at this point.

Governing boards and their search committees would do well to look at the hiring process from the point of view of the interim president, as discussed in Part II. Obviously, the interim president will perform better when he or she feels appreciated by the board and has a clear knowledge in advance of the procedures, powers, and perquisites.

Do *not* assume that a part-time arrangement is the best approach. Being an interim president may be a short-term job, but it requires full-time work. Exactly what "full-time" means should be made clear from the beginning; a seven-day work week plus a schedule of nightly public commitments has worn down even the staunchest of presidents.

Some other pertinent points:

- Treat the interim president as the chief executive. Provide compa-

rable salary and perks. (You might even provide a bonus for resolving really difficult problems.) Also, the interim president will need top-quality support staff right away.

- Determine the role of the interim president's spouse, if applicable.
- Realize that a temporary relocation can put strains on family and other relationships. If the interim president job is some distance away from the individual's permanent base, be prepared to allow for some occasional weekends at home. If the interim president—and perhaps spouse and family—is expected to move (and plans later to return to a previous home), determine how you will handle the expense of a furnished residence and moving costs both ways.

8. Settle sticky issues early. Once again, it is essential to have clear understandings between the interim president and the board *from the beginning of the relationship* on certain troublesome issues. For example:

- Does the board want a strong, active interim president who will be a mover and shaker? Or a calming caretaker?
- How can the board be encouraged to devote adequate time to important *current* issues as members become enmeshed in the search for a permanent president?
- What role will the interim president play in helping the board conduct the search for the permanent president? Interviewees reported a variety of arrangements. In some, the interim president had nothing to do with the search in any way. In others, the interim president made suggestions as to what the board should look for. In still others, the interim president was highly active, serving as a nonvoting member of the search committee and providing information, upon request, for the incoming permanent president. Two experienced academic chief executives served as interim president and search consultant at the same time!

9. Define and practice effective interim president-board relationships. An interim president called from outside needs help in getting acquainted with the institution. This indicates the need for an especially strong working relationship with the board. In particular, the interim president must rely on the board chair and the executive committee.

A board chair who also has been a campus chief executive notes that dealing with an interim president is subtly different from dealing with a permanent president. While trustees cannot and should not run the place, as one former president notes, they might meet a bit more often during an interim presidency. The board and the interim president must frequently discuss the direction of the institution and the use of resources to ensure they are moving on the right issues at the right speed. Such discussions

also might help the board start thinking about a comprehensive plan for the future of the institution.

10. Learn from the interim president's perspective. Any process involving the employment of a new chief executive is a learning experience for board members, and an interim presidency can provide an especially valuable opportunity. At some point during the interim president's service, and particularly at the end of the term, board leaders would do well to ask for another "snapshot" of the institution from the interim president's perspective. The perceptive chief executive already will have been noting such points as these:

- What institutional strengths might not be fully apparent?
- What areas of potential, if developed, might strengthen the institution, increase its value to its customers, and enhance its reputation and prestige?
- What unresolved problems and possible pitfalls require early attention, lest they become more serious?
- Which academic programs or services should be strengthened and expanded? Which might well be cut? What personnel situations need early attention?

This information also may be of great use to the search committee for the permanent president.

In any event, an exit interview can give board leaders an opportunity to thank the interim president for particular services rendered—as well as to indicate, candidly and privately, an occasional disappointment. Such an evaluation, properly done, can be useful to the departing interim president who might someday take on another such assignment.

In the spirit of fairness, the interim president also may have a thing or two to say. In particular, he or she is in an ideal position to offer valuable views on how well the board is functioning. As one board chair noted: "This is an opportunity for us to reinvent ourselves." This reinventing may continue long after the interim president departs.

When a board asks an outgoing interim president if there are any final words he or she wishes to share, all kinds of responses are possible. Said one forthright interim president, who was strongly committed to the university's academic improvement but did *not* want to be its permanent president: "They're damned lucky to have had me!"

PART 2

Advice to Interim Presidents from Those Who Have Been There

SPECIAL REPORT

Judging from the response of the 52 present or former interim presidents interviewed in this study, hindsight is in greater supply than foresight. These veterans had a great deal to say about their experiences—particularly about what worked. Some of their observations appear here under 12 action-related headings. While there is a natural sequence, readers will need to consider many of these admonitions together. Not only do they summarize major concerns for those thinking about becoming an interim president, they also raise questions for governing boards.

1. To be or not to be? Is an interim president assignment the right thing for you? If there is time, talk to wise people who have done it. But this may not be feasible, as trustees often want to get an interim president in place as soon as possible.

Would such an assignment fit well with your career at this point? Serving as an interim president sometimes leads to being a permanent president, either of that institution or of another one later. Frequently, it does not. There is no guarantee. Some respondents, however, felt that being an interim president could damage an individual seeking the permanent post at that institution. "*Don't* be a candidate," one interim president warned. "They'll doubt your motives all the time if you have to make unpopular

decisions or serious cuts."

Most of the respondents found the post challenging—and satisfying. "I like to fix things," said one individual. "This was a great opportunity." Another suggested that it was a practical way "to learn and demonstrate skills that I could use elsewhere as president"—which she went on to do.

One described being an interim president as "adventure intensive, with a possible downside and unknown situations that may be difficult for an outsider." Many of the difficulties, of course, are the same ones permanent presidents face. But there was a general feeling that things often happen faster to an interim president. The interim president needs to move quickly to resolve, or at least patch, pressing problems left over from the past administration. Sometimes the board wants to get things in shape rapidly, so the institution will be more attractive to desirable candidates for the permanent presidency.

Certain positive factors are apparent. The additional income and chance to use experience have special appeal for retirees. A change of scene and opportunity to move can provide a healthy stimulus for the mature president, close to point of retirement, who is looking for a "next step." A few respondents have come close to making a career of being an interim president. Perhaps these men and women are adventurers in the most positive sense of the word.

2. Find out as much as you can on your own. For an interim president to succeed—and for the institution to succeed—there must be a good match. Trustees must learn a lot about a potential interim president, as described in Part I. What does a potential interim president need to learn?

The usual information in nationally published directories, college guides, and rosters of accredited programs and institutions is an obvious place to start, but don't stop there. Read the institution's own publications, and sift the important facts from the glowing generalizations. Talk discreetly to knowledgeable people. Use your own networks and add to them as appropriate. Don't hesitate to run up your phone bill.

Try to size up the real situation. Some boards decide they need an interim president because of serious internal troubles, which they hope an outsider can help resolve. The board of one large state institution made a special point of using a national search consultant to identify outside candidates because most of its members were determined not to appoint a local candidate they believed to be "too political." When you meet the board or its committee (see Step 3), it is essential to explore questions and basic issues openly and frankly.

3. Find out more from the source. When the board (or its search committee) approaches you, the quest for truth about the situation becomes more intense. Early on, the board should tell you what happened to the latest president. Does this fit with what you have heard elsewhere?

Ask for, and study, whatever internal documentation you can get, including a reasonably candid and complete financial statement. Secure a copy of the most recent regional accreditation report that covers the whole institution. If you have time, check out the most recent accreditation documentation on major professional specialties of the campus. Ask questions: Are enrollment trends worrisome? Is the admissions office drawing from too deep in the barrel? How many students complete degree programs? At some point, find out if faculty or staff operate under collective-bargaining agreements. If so, read the contracts.

A senior and nationally respected university president, himself once an interim president, urges a search for any hidden situations: fiscal skeletons, lawsuits, emerging athletic scandals, personnel grievances, union contract issues, or other matters yet unresolved. Is there a clear plan for the future of the institution? Are there presidential candidates on campus who could help or hinder?

Don't panic if the news seems discouraging. In such a situation the trustees more than ever need a wise and dedicated interim president who might be you. If they squirm, vocally or otherwise, when you politely but firmly raise tough questions, it may be because they're unhappy about what they know—or what they *don't* know. Have they been tending to their responsibilities as good stewards of the institution? If not, don't despair. They may come to appreciate what you can do for them as they face the immediate challenges of getting the institution in shape and carrying out the search for a permanent leader.

Find out if the board really knows what it wants. Ask institutional representatives what they believe to be major problems, what they hope you might do to help solve them, and how they propose to help. Don't rush them; this may be a new experience for some boards. And don't be surprised at wide-ranging responses with a solution often somewhere in the middle. Differences of opinion are perfectly understandable and not unusual. Be on the lookout, however, for any major cleavages that could make your life difficult if you take the job.

Do they want a caretaker or a dynamic leader? One interim president was amazed to find after taking the reins that "the toughest thing was keeping the good momentum going at the college when all the trustees wanted was a holding pattern." On the other hand, members of another board that had faced cataclysmic budget cuts each year for five years wanted an interim president to produce, within months, signs that the university

was becoming "a world-class institution," as proposed in an optimistic report issued just before the roof fell in financially. (A grand idea, but somewhat unlikely in one year!)

Continue your fact finding by talking to others in the campus community. The general climate on the campus is of vital importance. Are faculty, staff, and students working with a sense of togetherness? Or are there battles, visible or invisible, that may have contributed to the departure of the last president? Problems often come in clumps. (See Appendix B for more detail on what leads to presidential vacancies.)

Find out what faculty members *think* they need, and then determine what they *really* need. They may simply want the president to listen to them—a new experience on some campuses. Initially, this may be more important to them (and certainly more possible) than giving them the immediate pay raise they want.

Finally, identify the quality and nature of leadership on the board. For instance:

- Are trustees ready to work together to face major issues? If not, is there a likelihood they could?
- Is there a recognized leader with other knowledgeable and dedicated people working with him or her?
- Could you work with them?
- Do they expect miracles?
- Will they work with you to gain credibility, funding, and students, and to enhance the good name of the institution?
- Are they really committed to the institution?
- If you take the job, will they work with you in the right ways, recognizing the respective and complementary roles of board and chief executive?

4. Identify and agree upon expectations and top priorities. Many of the interim presidents said they wished they and the board had established clearer understandings from the start. "The expectations really weren't defined," said one interim president. Agreements should cover two issues:

- What does the board want to happen during the interim period?
- How much power will it delegate to the interim president to accomplish those goals?

Discussion of such issues should yield agreement on what the institution needs during the next few months. If an institutional plan exists for the future—perhaps with a timetable already developed—should the new interim presidential administration move ahead with it? Or should changes be considered at this point?

In rare cases, and with trustee concurrence, an interim president might launch a few major projects that are not likely to be completed during the

interim term. Generally, however, major changes in institutional direction are best deferred until the permanent president is on board. Such changes might include an overhaul of institutional goals, the start of an ambitious fund-raising campaign, or a complete shake-up of top-level administrative units and personnel. Advises one former president, who is a veteran of seven interim terms, "Don't change things too much. If the interim president makes a number of changes and then the new president makes a lot, it may be more than the faculty and students can take."

On the other hand, there may be program, financial, and personnel issues that cannot wait and should be settled now, at least in general terms. If the board already knows of such matters and expects the interim president to act on them, it should make that clear. Another approach is to give the interim president a month or two (especially if that person comes from outside the institution) to size things up and then identify a few needed objectives for the interim period.

Crisis situations (such as falling enrollments, possible insolvency, extensive faculty squabbles, and serious physical plant deterioration) may call for immediate action. The interim president may wish to encourage campus discussion and get input from various perspectives, especially on matters pertaining to instruction and faculty affairs. Many of those interviewed reported that a lack of such consultation had contributed to the downfall of a previous president. However, fact finding must not become an excuse for procrastination. If the health of the institution is at stake, the interim president and the governing board must agree to not postpone unpopular decisions for too long. In fact, an interim president often has an advantage here: A person without a long-term role on a particular campus can make and carry out necessary decisions without worrying about acquiring enemies in future years.

In addition to agreeing on goals, the board and the interim president must establish the interim president's power to move ahead. If the interim president is seen as ineffectual, entrenched faculty or staff may play a waiting game, holding off key action until the permanent president arrives (and perhaps delaying even more at that point). Of course, the interim president should keep the board informed and seek its approval on policy matters.

The power to fire and hire is essential, but use it carefully. "Let the campus know that you have the power," one interim president urged, "but don't use it too fully or too often." Refrain from any thorough reorganization or permanently filling all major administrative posts. These moves are better left for the permanent president.

5. Work out a mutually useful written agreement. In addition to the usual employment matters of salary, benefits, and retirement, a good in-

terim president agreement should address several other issues. One is the nature and extent of power delegated to the interim president, as described above.

In addition, the agreement should specify any limit on how long the interim president will serve. For the 52 interim presidents interviewed, the assignment ranged from six months to three years. A period of ten to 12 months appears to be the norm; as noted elsewhere, rare special situations may call for more or less.

One experienced higher education leader who had been a campus president, federal official, and college trustee recommended that a letter of intent also should note "the amount of notice each party should give the other." It also is important to clarify such matters as use of the president's house and any role a spouse is expected to play.

Title should be settled now. Respondents clearly perceived the term "acting president" as denoting less power. That title appears to be more appropriate for an officer filling in for a regular president who is temporarily absent—for instance, due to a special assignment, travel, or illness. It usually goes to a No. 2 person—a provost or senior vice president—who steps up for a short period.

Most interim presidents would agree with the individual who said, "For the interim, I am the president." One interim president had "interim president" printed on his business card. His board chair suggested dropping the word "interim" for public use and printing new cards, presumably to give him more perceived power. In another situation, an individual serving as interim president was not viewed clearly as chief executive by all persons on the campus. He was particularly disappointed when he discovered he was not even a serious candidate for the permanent position.

The interim president and the board must work out the matter of salary. While this study did not compare interim presidential pay to pay for a permanent president on a given campus, it is logical to assume that if the interim president is to carry full responsibility, he or she should receive comparable pay. (That an individual might be drawing retirement pay elsewhere has nothing to do with what he or she is worth on the job.) The head of one major state university system believes an institution should treat an interim president as a full-fledged chief executive, with benefits including retirement, insurance, housing, travel, car, and appropriate club memberships, as well as support staff for office and house.

If an interim president was serving on that campus or within the same system, it is important to spell out "reentry rights." Will the old job, or a similar or even better one, be available at the end of the interim term? Is paid leave for transition and readjustment in the picture?

Employment agreements display a wide variation from the most flex-

ible to the most firm. One respondent agreed to take on the interim president job at a small private college after a planned meeting with three trustees in a local bar. They agreed to a arrangement in which either side could terminate the relationship on 30 days' notice. The interim president has been happily at the helm of that college for almost four years. In contrast, the interim president of a state university—a more prescribed and legalistic environment—served under a formal board resolution stating that he would serve until a permanent head was in place, approximately 12 months, and under no circumstances longer than 18 months. Further, in no case would he be a candidate for the permanent position.

6. Get off to a good start. Without exception, interim presidents spoke of the importance of getting off on the right foot. Almost every individual had his or her own way of doing this, but several suggestions came up repeatedly:

- Read about the institution extensively before you arrive.
- Be there, especially when classes start.
- Find out what people think the place needs that can be achieved fairly quickly.
- Identify campus strengths and good ideas, regardless of source.
- Quietly identify problems, but don't talk too much about them.
- Do not bad-mouth anyone either privately or publicly.
- Tell people what your style is and how you like to do business.
- Identify your expectations for the institution, including what can be fixed during your term.
- Be visible and available.

Some additional suggestions merit more discussion here:

- *Listen.* Listen closely to find out what may have gone wrong, but don't dwell on it too much. A Catholic nun who became interim president at a traditionally Franciscan institution observed that "listening is like a confession, but in this case there's no absolution!" In any case, make it clear that you are not there to criticize the former president.

One interim president noted the perception that "nobody in the president's office had ever listened before." In time, he also found that people were relatively willing to accept his saying "no" when necessary, because they knew he had listened first.

- *Open up communications and allay fears.* This is particularly important for interim presidents going to troubled campuses. One interim president and her chief financial officer convinced the community that they were listening by putting out a series of short memoranda called "Scotching the Rumor of the Week."

Informal face-to-face discussions can be very useful. Small weekly "town

meetings" calmed deep-seated fears of faculty and students who were concerned that their struggling private college would be merged into another. The interim president there described herself as "compulsively honest," and the previously nervous faculty quickly discerned this positive characteristic.

• *Minimize misunderstandings.* In one especially tense situation, the interim president of a small private college distributed copies of speeches she made to forestall misinterpretations of what she had said. When a financial emergency forced certain changes, she carefully checked with the institution's legal counsel before making announcements.

A Jesuit priest who became interim president at a large public urban college floated ideas to faculty by means of four major memoranda. He sought comments before taking any action, so his decisions did not come as a surprise. He worked hard to "get good people who were angry to calm down."

• *Don't take on more than you can deliver.* Discuss with campus leaders any current master plan or other related report. Develop a shared vision of how campus segments can work together in that direction, but hold off the "big vision" opportunities for later.

Similarly, don't make any phony promises or try to answer every question instantly. Be prepared for pressure by one or more groups: Listen attentively, by all means, but remember that you don't have to provide final answers in the first conversation.

• *Get to know people—fast.* Campus people want to know who the interim president is and what he or she is like. Those already on the scene, such as trustees, can help. One experienced system chancellor hosts an afternoon coffee-and-tea event on campus as part of the welcoming procedure for a new interim president.

Getting acquainted is especially important at large or nonresidential campuses. One veteran interim president of a rapidly expanding urban campus found he needed not only to introduce himself but also to help faculty members get to know their own colleagues.

Interim presidents introduce themselves and their hopes when they speak to the faculty in assembly. On campuses with collective bargaining, they become acquainted with the union leadership but typically do not participate in the nuts-and-bolts aspects of management-labor meetings. (Customs and requirements may vary, of course.)

One experienced president who handled four successive interim terms liked to reach faculty members' hearts through their stomachs. At one university, where he learned that even the deans had been unable to get the ear of the previous president, he started a series of brown-bag luncheons, enabling faculty to talk with him informally. In another instance, when he

was interim president of a community college that lacked a sense of community, he invited faculty members to dinner at the president's house—not a frequent occurrence in the past—and entertained them with his skill at Chinese cooking.

7. Count on being surprised. Be aware that surprises are the rule for interim presidents. "I just wish the trustees had been more forthcoming," mused one experienced president after the first few weeks of his interim presidential service. "Surely they could have told me more at the beginning."

Some of those interviewed reported these examples:

- *Budget and enrollment.* These areas can offer surprises separately, but together they are really bad news. The interim president of a small church-related college with a large and inattentive governing board discovered that the budget was being overspent and the freshman class was not filled. The trustees had not advised him of this before he arrived, and perhaps the departed president wasn't fully aware. The new interim president required weekly reports thereafter.
- *Town and gown relations.* This is an area important for all campuses, but particularly so for community colleges where a significant part of the support comes from local tax funds. After some fairly firm face-to-face conversations with one interim president, a county executive came to respect the college administration and also learned that to get a first-class permanent president in a nationwide search, the college would need to offer a salary range significantly above that of typical county employees.
- *Fuzzy decision-making structure.* The interim president at a century-old private university inherited the former president's cabinet, which turned out to be an overly large and diffuse committee. Members talked endlessly and did not help the chief executive make timely decisions. The result was excessive drift. The interim president slimmed down the cabinet to four vice presidents.
- *The voice of the past.* In at least two cases, although the board thought it had cleared the decks by appointing an interim president from outside, the departing president failed to depart gracefully. One former president kept calling and annoying the interim president. In another situation, the former president apparently allowed some faculty to believe that he would be rehired. Wise trustees find ways to prevent such situations.
- *Hostility against the departed president.* When a president is encouraged or forced to leave, the faculty and staff who remain often harbor hard feelings. This is not surprising and leads to the need for peacemaking and healing. In one situation, the extent of the campus feeling against the former chief executive—evidenced by a massive "no confidence" statement—was overwhelming and indeed amazing to the incoming interim president.

• *Dinosaurs and dragons.* Several interim presidents discovered personnel—often decent and well meaning—who no longer could handle their increasingly demanding jobs. Sometimes relocation within the institution is better than outright firing. For instance, one interim president discovered that campus people were having trouble reaching him, thanks to a senior secretary, known behind her back as "the Dragon Lady," who believed it her sacred duty to guard his door and let in only those people of whom she approved. She had outlived any possible usefulness in that job and was transferred elsewhere.

8. Develop staff, structure, and style. Early on, you may have discussed with the trustees your need to have an assistant and a chief secretary. These people may be on the job already and provide good service. If they are effective staffers and are not damaged by the transition, their internal knowledge of the institution can be especially valuable. Matters of integrity and staff's willingness to change bosses need to be worked out prior to your starting work.

For the most part, the interim presidents interviewed were able to make good use of most of the administration who were in place when they arrived. They did not often mention problems with the chief *academic* officer (provost or vice president for academic affairs), who typically is the second in command. Several, however, reported the lack of an effective chief *financial* officer. New interim presidents sometimes replace this individual by moving up a qualified inside person. Others have brought in a person from outside.

You will need a relatively small cabinet. Its members need to be effective leaders of their respective major areas as well as people who can work well together on behalf of the *entire* campus. If such a team does not exist, try to put one together. Look for good people inside who could be given greater responsibilities. You may, of course, find weak spots—and where you find one, you will most likely find more. As one person observed: "First-class people appoint first-class people to help them. Second-class people often appoint *third*-class colleagues."

Very few interim presidents found it necessary to make structural changes in the administration. The best approach is to figure out what will work and leave major changes to the permanent president, unless there are serious problems.

Whatever you do, find at least one or two campus people you can trust as completely as possible. They can provide insights based on institutional experience and knowledge of good practice. Persons of integrity and vision can help you navigate by warning of dangerous areas. You can try out ideas on them privately before you settle on a course of action. With the

right kind of mutual and positive relationships, such colleagues will—*in the interest of the institution*—tell you when you are wrong and what you might do about it.

Finally, as one interim president advised, "Now is the time to get rid of "real bummers!"

9. Use outside talent as necessary. You cannot run an organization solely with part-time consultants. But when necessary, you can supplement campus people with individuals who have special skills and abilities.

Even if you are an experienced administrator, you still may need some help in such occasionally vexing areas as salary structure, institutional research, development, plant management, and such services as food and bookstore. (Let the board know this in advance.) Outside help can keep you from getting bogged down in details as you attempt to serve the *entire* institution. Consultants can make proposals, which you can test on campus before making final decisions.

Outside help can come in other ways besides paid consultants. One interim president on a Florida campus developed short-term visiting assignments, drawing prestige scholars from northern institutions during winter months. Another interim president who had a host of contacts in the surrounding cultural and artistic community was able, at a time of financial crisis, to get them to do things for his college without remuneration. In addition, once they discovered the college's strengths firsthand, these highly visible citizens could "spread the good word" that the college (which was facing a possible merger and loss of identity) was worth saving and supporting.

One interim president, new to the world of chief executive responsibilities, made good use of mentors at another institution who—quietly and appropriately—were able to offer sound advice and counsel. It is especially lonely being an interim president for the first time.

10. Maintain the right amount of communication with the board. Some boards feel relieved when they have an interim president in place and functioning. They already may have been through some elements of crisis and are pleased to have a responsible person in charge. Still, interim presidents occasionally reported that trustees spent time and effort looking over their shoulder or seeming to micromanage. In contrast, others expressed concern that the hard work and fascination with the *permanent* search process drew significant trustee attention away from the "regular business" of helping the interim president run the campus.

A clear understanding of mutual expectations, established at the outset, can help events move ahead smoothly. At board meetings, the interim president should indicate progress, especially toward meeting major goals.

Of greatest importance: Have regular one-on-one conversations with the board chair and possibly—under the right circumstances—one or two other people designated by the chair. The interim presidential period provides a unique opportunity for frankness and candor that can be good for the institution. As one experienced interim president noted, "A president is an agent of the board, but more than that, he or she is an adviser to the board."

Other practical suggestions:

- Ask trustees to discourage "end runs." Some people on campus know you are not going to be around forever and may try to bypass you.
- Help improve board procedures. You are free to tell the trustees honestly what you really think and observe. This is a rare opportunity for them. (One interim system head saw one of his roles as helping a five-campus system board become more functional.)
- Talk with the board leadership after you have been on the job for a month or so. What have you observed that might suggest modifying the major goals for the interim periods?
- Discuss early on what role, if any, you are to have in the search for the permanent president. (See more detailed discussion in Part I.)

11. Take good care of yourself (and your family). In the midst of the myriad demands on your time, energy, and fortitude, do not forget your own personal needs. There are satisfactions in being an interim president, but there are frustrations, too. An interim presidential assignment can be hard on relationships with spouse, children, and close friends. These people may need to be involved in the decision you make to be an interim president. Discuss in *advance* the campus role of your spouse (if applicable) and arrive at clear understandings.

Your quality of life depends in great part on your living arrangements. Seek ways to conserve your energy for the real challenges. Commuting can be exhausting; at least one veteran interim president emphasized the value of living close by. If presidential housing is provided, use it for campus purposes within reason, but do not do it to excess—do not spend money on unnecessary remodeling or lavish entertaining, particularly if money is tight. A few interim presidents lived at their existing homes. Others, when the distance was not too great, went home on weekends. Understandings regarding such matters should be worked out in advance with the board.

Moving yourself and your family to another location for a short term—and back again—can be especially challenging for children. One interim president's child, a musician, was helped greatly by being mentored in the new school by more experienced members of the school band.

In general, watch for signs of burnout, which can happen even within a

year. In their interviews, interim presidents offered some useful suggestions:

- Long vacations are not possible for obvious reasons, but do plan some down time, with an occasional long weekend or a personal day added to a business trip. (When you are gone, be sure to have an effective person holding down the fort who is able to reach you by phone when truly necessary.)
- If you came to the interim presidency from within the institution, be sure to have an exceptionally good person filling your old job (to which you might go back). You can't handle two demanding jobs at the same time.
- Off-campus community demands become a way of life for many permanent presidents, but an interim president won't have much time for such activities, at least at the start. Typically, people in the community will understand. One interim president found this a great relief after having been swamped by requests for community service during his 12 years in an earlier presidency.
- Take care of your body and spirit. Learn how to turn off. Walk or adopt some other form of moderate exercise that you can do regularly. Enjoy music, literature, theater, or sports events (particularly if you can avoid mentally taking over the job of director or coach).
- Talk it out. One interim president stated that "this job makes me crazy," but actually it didn't—partly because she had the good opportunity to sound off privately at home at night. By coincidence, her husband was a psychiatrist, but she noted that any good listener might have helped.
- One interim president recently had gone through a divorce and was living by himself at a somewhat isolated institution. He found that eating fairly often with student groups helped him become better acquainted with the campus and mitigated some of the loneliness.
- Finally, some bittersweet admonitions: Do not get so attached to the institution that the conclusion of your term is really painful. Remember that for an interim president, respect is more important than love. Don't be disappointed if the amount of praise is limited.

12. Plan for effective concluding experiences. When it's time to go, you can play a major role in making a smooth transition for the institution—and for yourself.

Practices vary widely as to the role of interim presidents in the search for the permanent president (as noted in Part I). Some boards want the interim president to stay at arm's length from the whole process, and some interim presidents prefer that. However, a wise board would certainly do well at least to seek confidential input from the interim president on what the college or university needs in a permanent leader.

How much should the interim president tell the permanent president, once that person is selected? The initiative certainly should come from the board and/or the new leader. Several interim presidents followed the procedure of being available on request to answer questions but avoided giving excessive free advice. One interim president recommended providing "not more than one afternoon." Others agreed to be accessible for future conversations *when asked.*

One interim president made a particular point of telling the incoming permanent president the truth—about everything. "I didn't cover up problems," he said, "but I did indicate how a permanent executive might be able to resolve them. I prepared a detailed report that could be used or not." This wise individual also stressed the importance of "not hanging around after the permanent president starts."

The institution may provide a public or private going-away event for you and your family. This is important, and you should enjoy it. Don't turn it down, even if you are genuinely modest. The campus may find it a useful milestone and possibly a rite of passage.

But of greatest importance is the informal, private exit interview with the board. The information that only you—with your relatively short but unique experience—can provide will be of great use to wise board members. They may be interested in your observations on such matters as these:

- If the previous president faced difficulties, how could they be avoided in the future?
- What are particular strengths of the institution that you may have helped develop (or perhaps were there all the time)?
- Are there "caution areas" as well as hopeful prospects for the years ahead?

Mostly happy endings. What happened to the 52 interim presidents interviewed in this study? Nine were still in their interim president posts at the time of the interview. Of the rest, 14 retired; 12 returned to the positions or institutions from which they were on leave; 11 became permanent presidents (six of those at the institutions where they had served as interim presidents), and five went to other interim presidencies. One became a vice president at another institution. (Appendix A has more details.)

As to your own next steps, you undoubtedly deserve and need some breathing time. If you are interested in future work in higher education, you probably have let that be known along the way through your professional relationships and your own networks. You may wish to do a private post-mortem on what you learned from the interim president experience; this could be of special value if you consider being an interim president again. If your service, however brief, has put the institution on a stronger footing, you can be proud. Good luck in your future endeavors!

37

PART III

Higher Education Systems: Advantages and Opportunities

SPECIAL REPORT

Continuity of leadership is especially important in higher education systems. The complexity of most systems and their close relationships with the general public and with government agencies place unusual demands on chief executives—whether permanent or interim—of campuses and of systems themselves.

Some considerations of interim presidencies are specific to systems. In particular, the system head plays an especially important role in identifying presidents of individual campuses and encouraging their effective performance. As noted elsewhere, while practices vary across the United States, this paper will use the term *chancellor* to indicate the head of a system and *president* to mean the head of a single campus. Moreover, systems themselves occasionally need the services of an interim leader. While this study focuses primarily on campus interim presidents, brief attention is given at the end of this section to the use of interim chancellors.

System governing boards facing interim president situations have at least seven positive opportunities that boards of freestanding institutions do not always enjoy to the same extent.

1. Foresight. Presumably, the system has an effective chancellor who already knows how individual presidents are performing on the campuses

across the system. While there are surprises, of course, the chancellor often is aware in advance of approaching retirements, developing health situations, and (occasionally) forthcoming resignations.

Likewise, the chancellor and informed board members usually are aware of the strengths, needs, and weaknesses of campuses and their leadership. In those systems with regular review procedures of campus presidents, the need for an interim president occasionally may be visible. As one system head succinctly put it, "It's smart to look down the road ahead and have your plans ready."

2. Established procedures. In well-organized systems, the "who does what" steps usually are clear in advance. If policies already are in effect and widely understood, trustees and other officials need lose no time inventing ground rules when a presidential vacancy occurs.

Generally favored procedures suggest an interim president should be appointed and put in place in a timely manner with some, but not excessive, involvement of faculty, students, and other stakeholders. Typically, the chancellor is responsible for recommending a choice to the system governing board, which must approve it. The board leadership often knows what is needed on that campus and why this particular choice is presented.

Moving quickly, the head of one major system completed an interim presidency appointment in one week, having spent the weekend consulting with individual trustees. The election of the new interim president took place in a brief teleconferenced board meeting on Monday morning, and the new leader went to work at once.

3. Available leadership. System boards often appoint campus interim presidents from elsewhere within the system. These individuals usually are recognized and qualified professionals who know the institution (warts and all) and can hit the ground running. Their service often can begin almost immediately. As in other cases, their assignment buys time for an extensive national search for a permanent president.

A good performance as a campus interim president can make an individual a highly visible candidate for future permanent presidencies in that system, as well as elsewhere. For example, a system such as the 14-campus State System of Higher Education in Pennsylvania typically appoints a highly qualified vice president from one campus as interim president at another campus; while the appointee is not considered for the permanent presidency there, he or she later may become head of a third campus. The State University of New York system, for instance, has used the interim presidency as a "a testing ground for someone from a different campus who is willing not to be a candidate for that post," according to Bruce

Johnstone, former SUNY chancellor. This person could consider seriously the proposal of a presidency elsewhere sometime in the future.

Central office personnel sometimes are good sources. Budget cuts have slimmed many central administrations, however, so that there are "rather few candidates left who have the experience necessary to handle an interim presidency," said one chancellor. An occasional option is a recently retired president from another system campus.

Systems occasionally depart from these approaches. To meet a perceived special need for a minority-group interim president, one system appointed an individual from a major private institution in the same state. In another case, where the system board was badly split over a particular local candidate, the board finally selected an individual with experience from another state's system. And two relatively small systems, finding no good candidates in either their system offices or in other campuses in their system, named interim presidents from out of state.

4. Specialized help. Interim presidents at many types of institutions frequently find themselves in need of new financial officers. System arrangements make it possible to "borrow" an appropriate individual either from the central office or from a sister campus. Interviewees also reported occasional examples of borrowing academic and other officers within a system.

Interim presidents seeking expert help in legal matters, institutional research, government relations, campus security, and planning procedures often are able to draw on consultants who have worked elsewhere within the system. This makes good sense; these specialists already "know the ropes" and are familiar with making the bureaucracy work.

5. Making the interim president job attractive. It is clearly in the best interests of any system to present itself as a good employer for executive talent, and several aspects of a system interim presidency can be particularly appealing to candidates. As previously noted, a successful vice president or similar officer who is ready for a greater challenge can use an interim post to test being a chief executive, often with "retreat rights" to his or her previous job.

In compact systems whose campuses all lie within one metropolitan area, such as the City University of New York or Miami-Dade Community College District, an interim president chosen from within the system often doesn't have to change residence, avoiding the disruption of a move.

Being mentored by friendly officers within the system can be attractive to the interim president, whether he or she is chosen from within the system or from outside. This can provide useful career advice and constructive criticism of performance.

6. Other benefits to the system. Chancellors and other central office administrators need to have a true picture of life on the system's campuses, but the nature of their positions sometimes makes this difficult. Even in the best systems, turf and autonomy issues can continue. However, a central office administrator who serves on a campus as an interim president often can clarify the campus perspective for system leaders.

In addition, a system central office can do its work better and enjoy greater respect from campus-based officials when some of the system office's personnel have served as campus executives and faced campus problems on a daily basis.

Occasionally an interim president brought in from outside the system can spot actual or potential problems not always noted by administrators already on the scene. One such individual, an experienced campus executive, realized soon after his arrival that procedures followed by the campus development office had the potential to create problems with the Internal Revenue Service. Aware that similar practices might exist on other system campuses, he alerted the chancellor, who looked into the matter and took appropriate steps.

7. Stimulus by scrutiny. System chancellors and board members, like leaders at freestanding institutions, saw value in using the interim period as a time for institutional self-scrutiny. Depending on local factors, this can be done formally or informally. It should be carried out in ways that are not disruptive. In the words of one respondent, "You don't have to pull up a tomato plant by its roots to learn how it's growing!"

In any event, interim periods at public institutions will be watched by hawk-eyed citizens and the media who want to know how well the public's business is being carried out. State leaders, from governors and legislators to staffers of various agencies, not only can watch but can act on what they see. Campus faculty and employee organizations, students, alumni, and benefactors—both actual and potential—are all watching, too. A system's effectiveness in handling a transition can earn respect and even admiration.

Additional advice. System governing boards and leaders would do well to consider a few more admonitions.

- Carry out some—but not too much—consultation with the leadership of the *campus* board of trustees or local advisory council, if such a body exists. These are important people and should not be bypassed. On the other hand, procedures need to make clear in advance that the power to appoint an interim president is in the hands of the chancellor and system board.
- If the interim president comes from the central office, avoid presenting him or her as a "company person." An individual who is bureaucratic

and heavyhanded can easily gain that reputation. It need not be that way: One interim president, on leave from his position in a system office, came to a particular campus with the clear understanding that he was *not* eligible for the permanent presidency. Nevertheless, he performed so well that some 300 faculty petitioned the system to waive procedures so that he might be considered.

• Consider carefully the right length of interim president service for each individual campus. While six or twelve months may be right in most cases, a few special situations may call for a longer period for cooling, healing, and refocusing. The chancellor of one large system sees value in occasionally assigning interim presidents for periods of two to three years to allow a campus to settle down and then gradually get ready to search for the permanent president.

When the system needs a head. System governing boards sometimes need to fill the chancellorship on short notice. While many of the observations included here pertain to the head of a system as well as to the chief officer of a campus, there are some differences. Challenging as a campus presidency usually is, being chancellor of a system is even more complicated.

While almost all the chief executives in this study were campus heads, the experience of the five interim chancellors interviewed suggests two tentative conclusions:

• When things are going reasonably well, boards tend to select an inside person. Usually this is the second-ranking officer of the system, a current or recently retired campus head, or—rarely—a sitting trustee. These individuals have been intimately involved in the ongoing processes of the system and need little orientation time.

• When there are special problems within the system and sometimes at the top management level, boards often seek interim chancellors from outside. An interim chancellor in such a situation faces special challenges; for example, helping individual board members to function better as a team, balancing or neutralizing "warring factions" among campus presidents, improving financial practices (often closely linked to state government issues), and gaining greater recognition for the system itself as an important entity. Short-term outsiders can bring much-needed qualities ranging from broad experience and useful sophistication to unusual candor and frankness of approach.

Further study of procedures for selecting system heads, either interim or permanent, may be helpful.

A FINAL WORD

If you have read this far, you are aware of some of the advantages of using a carefully selected interim president to fill a sudden vacancy in the presidency of your institution. Whether you are a board chair, a potential interim president, or a system leader, there is no perfect blueprint to follow step by step.

Still, the suggestions contained here, based on years of experience by practitioners of the art of college and university administration, should be useful to you in your important work. Consider them well, select or modify the ones that pertain most closely to your situation, and then move ahead. Also feel free to call upon your friends at AGB who can put you in touch with consultants or others who may know of likely interim president candidates.

Good luck to you in your important work!

APPENDIX A

About the Interviewees

This report is based on 72 structured interviews, conducted over a period of 18 months. All 52 interim presidents I contacted agreed to be interviewed, even though many did not know me. The other 20 people interviewed included ten system heads, as well as trustees, association officers, or other individuals experienced in working with interim presidents. While preparing the manuscript, I conducted a few additional informal interviews, mostly to discuss and improve the "Up Front" findings.

Fifty-eight of the 72 interviews were conducted in person, and 14 were done by telephone. Many of the interviews took place at the interim president's place of employment; some were held at national meetings or other events in an effort to use travel funds effectively. The respondents included 57 men and 15 women. Ten respondents were racial minorities.

The ten permanent system heads included two each from California, Florida, and New York, as well as one each from Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The State University of New York and California State University were the largest systems represented in the interviews; the most populous campuses were the University of Michigan, the University of Georgia, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Of the 52 interim presidents, 16 served at private colleges or universities, and 36 served at public higher education institutions. Twenty-four of the public positions were at four-year campuses, seven were at two-year community colleges, and five were as interim heads of systems. Also, 11 of the 52 had significant public and private college experience.

Six of the 52 interim presidents had been trustees, at least two at the institutions where they later became interim presidents. Several had experience as permanent presidents; two were "repeaters," having been called back to a campus where they once had served as permanent president. Twelve of the 52 had served as interim president on at least two different campuses.

Some of the interim presidents had served in more than one locale; in their most recent positions, they represented the following:

New York	14	Georgia	1
Massachusetts	8	Illinois	1
North Carolina	6	Michigan	1
California	4	Ohio	1
Pennsylvania	4	Texas	1
Florida	2	South Dakota	1

Maryland	2	Virginia	1
Minnesota	2	West Virginia	1
District of Columbia	1	Wisconsin	1

The 52 interim presidents came to their posts from these places:

- 17 from other, unrelated campuses
- 12 from the same campus
- 11 from system central offices
- 5 from campuses in other systems
- 5 from an outside organization
- 2 from the campus' own board of trustees

Nine of the 52 interim presidents were still serving their terms at the time of the interview. Here's what the other 43 ended up doing:

- 14 retired (not unreasonable, since most were of typical retirement age at the time they took the interim presidency). Of the retirees:
  - 10 had been presidents previously (including two on the same campus as their interim appointment)
  - 3 had been vice president or dean
  - 1 had been from the central office of the system
- 17 went on to new positions in college/university administration:
  - 6 became permanent president of the same institution
  - 5 became permanent president of another institution
  - 5 took on another interim administrative position elsewhere
  - 1 became vice president of another institution
- 12 returned from whence they came:
  - 6 went back to positions in higher education or the corporate world from which they were on leave
  - 3 went back to their system office
  - 2 went back to their "old" jobs on the same campus
  - 1 went back to his early career of teaching, having been a permanent president and a central office administrator in between

Interim presidents, it appears, are versatile people. "Post interim" positions have included being president of a major orchestra, serving as a U.S. ambassador, heading a foundation, and planning for a potential community college in Hungary. Several former interim presidents wrote books. Two decided to get closer to the heart of the academic world and took on interim deanships.

APPENDIX B

Where They Went Wrong: Problems of Previous Presidents

Most presidents of the some 3,500 accredited colleges and universities in the United States provide good and sometimes excellent service, often under truly trying circumstances. In the eyes of some of the 52 interviewees, however, a number of their predecesors had some major shortcomings.

Almost all the 52 interim presidents interviewed for this study were called to that position after a president left on short notice. A few previous presidents departed for more attractive chief executive positions, and two left for major government positions in Washington, D.C. Some retired. Some took or resumed faculty positions. One vacancy resulted from the president's health troubles and one from a death.

However, most of the vacancies in this study (31 of 52) followed what might be termed "unhappy departures." Out of polite custom, officials usually described these merely as "resignations."

While some observers might attribute a president's departure to a single problem or event immediately preceding the resignation, more often a variety of interrelated problems contributed to the end of the president's tenure. The following situations were reported by interim presidents, as they looked back—often with sympathy and sorrow—at their predecessors' experiences. No single one of these factors necessarily will end a president's service. Operating together, however, they often are fatal.

- *Unhappy faculty relationships.* Based on interviewees' reports, this problem was frequent and sometimes overwhelming. At one small college, 70 percent of the faculty were said to be happy at the president's potential departure; at another, faculty filed a 50-page bill of complaints about the president.
- *Ineffective use of administrative staff.* A number of departing chief executives lacked effective teamwork at the top. While some second-tier turnover is inevitable and sometimes necessary, these cases revealed extreme patterns—six chief business officers in seven years, a new secretary every year. Even more unfortunate was the inability to appoint and work with second-echelon executives as a team. More than one president failed to correct a pattern of "end runs," in which vice presidents carried out an excessive amount of business directly with individual trustees. In other cases, the president was "at war" with a provost or senior vice president.
- *Personnel matters.* Several past presidents were ineffective at managing contracts and grievance situations. Some operated in such a way as to encourage individual lawsuits on personnel issues.
- *Poor financial management.* Some presidents faced problems because

they were insufficiently informed about fiscal matters and questionable expenditures. Several presidents reportedly committed money that actually was not available (however desirable the faculty raises may have been). Others apparently were unaware of current or future shortfalls. In two instances, presidents apparently would not listen to bad news from the chief financial officer or tolerated one who failed to report the true situation. More than one displayed a lack of concern over falling enrollment, even under a tuition-driven budget. Some presidents tolerated sloppy business practices; one case involved possible misuse of a college foundation in matters that might involve an IRS investigation. Some failed to use audits as effective management tools. No clear cases of embezzlement or criminal activity emerged, however.

- *Unstable behavior.* One former president precipitously presented to the faculty a plan for institutional reorganization based on "a dream I had last night." Another had a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality: He kept a hammer in his desk and reportedly threw it at a clock one day. In one widely publicized case, not represented in this study, a president just quit and disappeared; at the time, no one knew where he went.
- *Excessive absence from campus.* Every president travels as part of the job. But some seem to have traveled too much. One spent weeks on the alumni circuit, when more vital matters needed attention on campus. One veteran president built a highly visible national image while letting things fall apart at home. Another reportedly had an excessive penchant for golf.
- *Relations with local government.* This was a problem at county-sponsored community colleges. Presidents suffered from strained relationships with county managers, who were not convinced that a college was in a different league from a typical county agency—particularly when it came to faculty and administrator qualifications and remuneration.
- *Cronies and family members.* A few presidents made the mistake of appointing or promoting individuals largely on the basis on personal friendships rather than merit, at least in the eyes of faculty members. One former president reportedly hired his wife, who lacked appropriate credentials, as a dean. Another reportedly brought in some former associates from another institution and then fired them.
- *Seeming inaccessibility and unresponsiveness.* "His door was always closed," was one complaint. Another former president was "protected" so much that people had real difficulty in seeing him. Still another was "never in," even to his deans. Unresponsiveness to student needs was mentioned, but it did not seem to be a frequent factor.
- *Questionable sexual relations.* One president was relieved from duty because of improper relations with a young male student. Another was sued by a former girlfriend, to whom he allegedly had promised a job that

she did not receive. At least one other reportedly carried on multiple extramarital affairs.

- *Perceived insensitivity to racial issues.* Some presidents' performance raised concerns on two campuses whose racial mix was changing. In the often-tense climates of large urban campuses, presidents sometimes did not respond promptly to students' legitimate needs.
- *Personal style.* Several former presidents were perceived as being excessively autocratic. One "lone ranger"worked almost entirely by himself. One was a chameleon, sometimes charming, other times threatening and bullying. One truly well-meaning president came across as a "doom and gloom" person; his sense of humor and optimism never became widely visible.
- *Indecisiveness.* One president was constantly bogged down by administering his university largely through 19 committees. Another, trustees felt, was "too process-oriented, but with no bottom-line results."
- *Health problems.* These ranged from slow burnout to leukemia and terminal cancer. All are tragedies. One president died eight months after his inauguration. A particularly difficult situation involved a progressive condition of mental illness; the chief executive eventually was hospitalized, but until then, he "hung on" to the job far too long. This allowed campus conditions—morale, management, and finances—to deteriorate seriously. Blessedly, respondents cited no presidential suicides.
- *Athletic scandal.* One state university president's departure stemmed from an athletic scandal and the way he handled it. Interestingly, out of 31 unhappy departures, only one was directly related to a problem of athletics.
- *Bad judgment.* This category is a catchall. Indeed, almost all the foregoing problem situations are symptomatic of questionable judgment. For example, one president was too eager to take what he saw as a more important presidency elsewhere. He did not get it and found his bridges burned behind him. Another, already beset by serious faculty problems shortly after he arrived, used his president's office too obviously as a base to campaign for other jobs.
- *A statement of principle.* One system head resigned to protest draconian budget cuts decreed by state government. For this he probably should be praised!

In their review of an early draft of this report, two experienced academic chief executives asked why governing boards occasionally allowed presidential performance to become so ineffective that an interim president must be appointed. One asked why the board-president relationship continued if significant needs were not being met. The other suggested that the need to make major changes after a president's departure indicated "a laxity, a lapse, a failure" of significant board president relations.

He wondered, Why didn't the governing board insist on such changes during the term of the previous president?

That question is answered in publications from AGB and elsewhere in more detail than is possible in a report of this length. Nevertheless, the issues raised are not unrelated to the use and success of interim presidents.

Final Observations

- No one of these factors alone necessarily will end a president's service. Operating together, they often are fatal.
- Somewhat surprisingly, deterioration of academic program was not reported often as a problem by itself. Left untended, of course, other problems surely would lead to that. Relations with trustees might be deemed a similar factor.
- Some of these problems are situational. Some involve bad luck and unfortunate timing. Many, however, reflect on the president as an individual. Needed were integrity, judgment, ability to work with and appreciate colleagues, recognition of priorities, true leadership qualities, style, and grace under pressure, to name a few.
- Regarding previous presidents, perhaps more careful screening at the time of hiring might have uncovered individual weaknesses, which surely did not develop overnight. Some shortcomings might have been overcome, at least partially, with closer trustee counseling.
- With better foresight and improved efforts by trustees to help presidents improve at the first sign of trouble, there might have been less need to appoint interim presidents later.

APPENDIX C

Tips From Some Veterans

Based on his seven terms as interim president at different institutions over 16 years, and his previous 20 years experience as president of the University of Akron, Norman Auburn is an experienced executive. Auburn is an effective trouble-shooter who focuses on getting things shipshape for the next person as quickly as is reasonable. His list of practical admonitions starts out with "When in Rome...." His words to the wise include the following:

- Don't violate traditions.
- Don't change things too much. If the interim president makes a number of changes, and the new president makes more, it may be too much change for the faculty, staff, and students to absorb.
- Be a good listener, but be politely skeptical.
- Get the best ideas.
- Find out in whom you can safely confide.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Seek information from campus leaders, but weigh their answers and beware of hidden agendas.

The job of an interim president, Auburn suggests, is to "keep the store and work yourself out of a job. Work as a proprietor with the consultant and committee looking for a permanent president; keep their noses to the grindstone!"

Bob Barringer, a veteran of nine interim presidential assignments, specializes in community colleges. Unlike most interim presidents, he also serves boards as their search consultant and actually conducts searches for them. When he begins a new job, he first looks for an institution's planning model or similar documents; if they do not exist, he initiates a planning process—an activity he deems essential.

Like other experienced interim presidents, he also looks for possible conflicts to see how much healing the campus needs, identifies priorities, and puts people to work on them. The success of his initiatives continues long after he is gone, he points out. As a concluding task, he often writes a "transition paper" on how the institution should attempt to get "from here to there."

The need for improved communication is a common theme from all the veterans. The late Harold Delaney (an experienced president, association executive, and central administrator in three major statewide university systems) emphasized the value of having a series of one-on-one conversations with a variety of people from across the campus. Ask a lot of

questions, he suggested, and make it clear that you are not there to criticize the former president.

One interim president took the reins at a major state university after having been permanent head of five other institutions and so brought to the interim presidency a wealth of experience. Like Tennyson's Ulysses, he had the appetite for one more exciting voyage, and he found it. The institution was in the throes of working through a major athletic scandal, and he discovered that to manage the crisis, he had to keep a lower than usual profile. "I felt I needed to be less active than my personality usually was," he remarked.

His disciplined approach enabled him to achieve results without making wholesale new appointments. He developed collegiality and included more faculty in institutional operations. Although his term was not long, admissions standards were raised, and for the first time in the institution's history, African Americans were represented on its athletic board.

While consultation and communication are necessary in any leadership position, balance them with needed action. Take advantage of the sense of urgency typical of interim president situations to implement solutions expeditiously. The short-term interim president usually does not have to worry about acquiring enemies over future years.

An experienced interim president has this to say: Interim/interregnums can be positive, but they also can defer the inevitable. An alert, wise, and capable interim president will want to leave his or her mark. A president is an agent of the board, but more than that, he or she is an adviser to the board. Hence, it is unlikely that a wise person would blindly accept a board's predetermined plan.

"Acknowledge the ethical and moral responsibility of a president (even if interim) to consult with faculty and staff to find the good sense of the matter," he adds.

As a final admonition, one former president who has become expert in helping others fill presidential vacancies has the following advice: Don't expect to reshape the place completely in a year unless the trustees have given you a special mandate to do so; build a staff and fire where necessary; and don't reward a dean (or anyone else) for "killing" the president.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership, directed by Clark Kerr. *Presidents Make a Difference: Strengthening Leadership in Colleges and Universities*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1985.

Kerr, Clark and Marian L. Gade. *The Many Lives of Academic Presidents*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1986.

Libby, Patricia A. *In Search of a Community College President*. Annandale, Va.: Association of Community College Trustees, 1983.

Nason, John W. *Presidential Assessment*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984.

Neff, Charles B. and Barbara Leondar. *Presidential Search: A Guide to the Process of Selecting and Appointing College and University Presidents*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1992.

Articles and Booklets

Birnbaum, Robert. "Why Presidents Succeed (and Fail)," *Trusteeship*, July/August 1993, 16-21.

Browe, Walter. "Is An Interim President a Phantasma?" *Trustee Quarterly*, Fall 1991, 11-13.

Cuninggim, Merrimon and F. Thomas Trotter. *The Selection of Seminary Presidents: An Informal Guide for Trustee Search Committees*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1985.

Gardiner, Thomas G. "Prairie State College: A Case Study in the Use of ACCT's Interim President Service and Chief Executive Search Service," *Trustee Quarterly*, Summer 1986, 10-12.

Lester, Virginia L. *Board Tips: Responsibilities of the Board and the Board Chair in the Search Process*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1993.

Lester, Virginia L. "How to Hire a Search Consultant," *Trusteeship*, November/December 1993, 25-29.

Neff, Charles B. "Clear Expectations," *Trusteeship*, May/June 1993, 20-23.

Neff, Charles B. "What's In a Presidential Contract?" *Trusteeship*, January/February 1994, 26-27, 34.

Neff, Charles B. and Barry Munitz. *The Business of Presidential Search*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1989.

Neff, Charles B. and Virginia L. Lester. *Candidate Tips: Preparing for Academic Leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1993.

Ostar, Roberta H. *Public Roles, Private Lives: The Representational Role of College and University Presidents*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1991.

Parker, C. Reed. "Reflections on a Successful Presidential Search," *Trusteeship*, November/December 1993, 28-29.

Scott, Robert A. "A Challenge to Presidents," *Trusteeship*, March/April 1994, 23-26.

Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

One Dupont Circle • Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036